

Archives Advisory Committee Report to Town Council

June, 2011

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

George Santayana; 20th century American philosopher.

Introduction:

June 30, the end of the Town's fiscal year, marks what may be considered the end of the first phase of the Archives Advisory Committee's existence and activities. The committee was created as a statutory body of the town a year ago, at last June's Town Council meeting, and constituted by the town in January 2011 when the Mayor nominated, and the Council approved, the seven-member group that has become the committee.

Since then, we have spent the bulk of our time assessing and learning. We have assessed our needs and our potential for action given the severe budget limitations under which we are working, and have spent time researching and talking to experts and archival managers in this region. These activities have given us the knowledge and insights we need to make a number of firm and critical decisions on what we should do now and in the future to make the Garrett Park Archives the institution it should be, consistent with the town's unique and wonderful character, and its rich and exceptional history.

The archives mission statement, adopted by the committee at its recent June meeting, appears in Appendix 3, below.

We will present our findings and proposals for action later in this report, but first, in the interest of transparency, here are details of our activities so far that explain and justify our decision to direct our archives improvement program in the way in which we have done so.

Activities so far:

Organization.

In January, Mayor Chris Keller nominated and the Town Council approved the following people to serve on the advisory committee: Marian Green, Nancy Schwartz, Glenda Ingham, Kay Hager, Jim Agenbroad, Nancy Walz and Charles Snyder. In June, Jim Agenbroad tendered his resignation, and the committee has put up the name of Rebecca Rawls of Clermont Avenue to be his replacement.

The advisory committee has held five meetings: January 17, March 7, April 4, May 3 and June 6. The agendas and minutes of those meetings are on the committee's page in the Town's Web site. Those meeting generally lasted between two and three hours and featured animated and intense discussions of all aspects of our plans and vision for the archives, and possible ways to achieve them. Our discussions virtually always ended in unanimous opinions and decisions. I can think of no area in which there was any serious disagreements or splits.

Research and outreach.

Much of the committee's activity has involved research into archival references, much of it on the Internet. We have downloaded a number of academic and professional documents covering archival management, organization and digitization. And, we have scoured the Web for information on management practices of other archives, and helpful programs among regional and national archival associations and government agencies.

An extremely important and valuable component of our activities involved reaching out to other archives in the area to tap their knowledge, experience, expertise and advice. We paid visits to the following:

1. Montgomery County Historical Society
2. Peerless Rockville
3. Sandy Spring Museum
4. Washington Grove
5. Chevy Chase Historical Society
6. Kensington

A list of the specialists we spoke with appears as appendix 1, below.

In addition, two archivists from the State Archives paid a visit to our archives for a meeting. We also benefitted from a study Glenda Ingham had done for the interim task force, the forerunner to the current committee, which was assembled by Barbara Shidler. That research yielded a wealth of information on the management and operations of five regional archives.

We learned several critical lessons from those visits. Generally, all of the professional archivists and archival volunteers we met had the same things to say. They all used a archival management computer program called PastPerfect, which appears to be in use by most if not all of the archives in the region. It is used to retain and sort information on documents, photographs, physical items and other material. All were happy with it, and we were uniformly impressed when we saw it used in person.

Most of the archives we spoke with relied heavily on volunteers. While they often used high school students, they were particularly happy with college students. Although we have registered for a county high school-level volunteer program, we have not tapped into the universities. We were told that George Washington, George Mason and the University of Maryland could be good sources of volunteers, since each has good history and archival programs.

All of the archival specialists stressed the importance of rigorous systems, guidelines, paperwork and the like. We are in the process of developing those, and plan to intensify these efforts once we get fully operational, which we hope to do by next month. The archivists also cautioned us to be patient, since the jobs of sorting documents, entering data, and scanning photos and documents take time. They cautioned that some tasks could take years, even with staff and ample volunteers.

My favorite lesson came from Stephanie Brown, the director of the Chevy Chase Historical Society archives, who said that they had made mistakes and who guaranteed that we would also make mistakes, no matter how hard we try to do everything right. That was salutary advice.

Volunteers.

This month, the Archives Advisory Committee completed the process of applying for registration in the county's Student Service Learning (SSL) program, and were registered. The program is the county's version of a state-run program among high schools that requires every student to complete 75 hours of community service before graduation from high school. Having been accepted, we can now post "opportunities" among the county's schools on the SSL Web site

to attract students to work in the archives free of charge. This is expected to be a major plus for our archives, since our greatest need now is for people to perform the myriad tasks that must be completed in the near term. We have been advised that Walter Johnson High School has at least one history teacher who should be helpful in finding student volunteers for us, and we will be contacting him. We can also contact the SSL coordinators at other schools as needed.

In addition to the SSL program, our registration entitles us to access to other programs run by the Montgomery County Volunteer Center, which runs programs that makes available seniors, pro bono consultants (including technology consultants) and other professionals, and allows us to post notes in an electronic volunteers newsletter that goes to some 7,500 readers. The seniors program alone involves more than 500 people. The volunteer center even has a language translation volunteer service.

Furthermore, we expect that we will be able to find Garrett Parkers, including youngsters, to volunteer to help their hometown's archives.

Oral History

After more than a year of inactivity, we have finally begun to clear the backlog of oral history tapes and transcripts, and have made substantial progress in doing so. We began to tackle the backlog with the expectation that as many as 80 tapes would need transcribing, and no clear idea of whom we would get to do the job. It turned out that the lion's share of the tapes had been transcribed, easing our task in planning our attack on the oral history. Moreover, we have found that a large portion of the transcriptions that we expected to need corrections and retyping were already corrected, and have been placed in permanent oral history files.

Elizabeth Henley

Although she does not become officially associated with the archives until July 1, we have found Elizabeth to be a valuable addition to our effort, performing a number of tasks that had to be performed to prepare the archives for the work that is to come. She has found ways to make space in our overcrowded room, ordered needed supplies, helped handily in getting us registered with the SSL student volunteer program, created and updated the archives' page on the town Web site, and worked on correcting oral history transcriptions, among other things.

Archives' physical condition

We have not yet made much of a dent in addressing what will be a crucial task: Assuring the physical well-being of the archival material through environmental controls and document preservation techniques. During the deliberations of the interim task force put together by Barbara Shidler, Alix Levy prepared an action program that contained many of the areas we must attack, and once we have an ongoing program of sorting, digitizing and organizing the archives' materials, we will begin to tackle the environmental concerns.

Mission

A mission statement is appended at the end of this report, briefly outlining the importance of the archives and the mandate of the committee to the archives and the town to preserve its past.

Proposals and decisions:

Digitization

To create a functional, modern archive, it is clear to the committee that the Garrett Park Archives must be digitized, with information on all its documents, photos and other materials entered into a computer, and the original documents and photos (and photos of the other materials) eventually entered into the computer, also. To do this, the committee has settled on the PastPerfect software, which, as pointed out above, is the program of choice for the archives of this region. This is a program that runs on a PC system. We have determined in talks with experts that such a system should have no trouble “talking” to the town’s MAC-based system via a shared drive or server.

We have been told by archivists using the system that it is relatively easy to use, even among neophytes, and that it fits the needs of a small archive such as our very well. We have seen it in operation and are all impressed with it. Among its other advantages is that with PastPerfect, we eventually will be able to communicate with other regional archives, perhaps finding items about Garrett Park that are not in our archives now, and gaining advice from their archivists on solving problems we run into. Another is that if we do hire an archivist from within this region, he or she will likely be familiar with PastPerfect.

Among the accessories we will need is a high-resolution scanner able to scan both documents and photos into the computer and onto the PastPerfect program. Currently, copies of all of the town’s historic photos are, as we understand it, in Ted Pratt’s computer in the town office. According to Ted, these have been scanned at 200 dpi (dots per inch) and must be rescanned for quality at 300 dpi. We can hold off buying a scanner until that rescanning project becomes necessary, and we can then scan photos into the archives computer. Many oral history transcripts are also in the town office computer, and these can be rescanned if needed (or otherwise transferred) onto the archives computer. The Maryland State Archives also has a scanning program for what we believe to be a nominal fee, and that would be available to us.

Nancy Walz has been especially helpful in researching and evaluating the PastPerfect system and our overall digitization needs.

Volunteers

We plan to make optimal use of volunteers, which, it turns out, are essential to enable even larger archives in the area to function. They will come from town residents, students and others we find through the School Service Learning (SSL) and county Volunteer Center networks. Volunteers working in the archives will have to be supervised carefully and this can be done by Elizabeth and one or more of our committee members until we hire an archivist. Other volunteers, such as people conducting, transcribing and retyping oral history interviews, will need less supervision, and can often work at home.

We probably cannot tie into the SSL program in time for the end of the school year (which comes this week), but hopefully we can get students during the summer, anyway. We will have many competitors seeking volunteers, many of them offering interesting and even exciting opportunities for the students. We think, though, that Garrett Park can hold its own.

Of course, the volunteer program is not only for the summer, but for the entire school

year. So we should be able to look forward to a steady stream of volunteers, if we handle the program correctly. In any event, the people who run the program have been very helpful and willing to assist with overcoming any challenges we have faced. We have spoken to them and they know us, so the lines of communication are open (and work very well).

Elizabeth Henley/Archivist

Starting July 1, Elizabeth Henley's hours will be extended by four hours a week to allow her to spend those hours working in the archives. This will give the archives a major leg up in our efforts to sort, make accessible and preserve the archival material. Her tasks will be part archivist, part clerk and will follow much of the archival job description attached in Appendix 2.

However, it is essential that the town find a trained archivist. Such an archivist will be part-time, perhaps four to eight hours a week. We have found that several archivists in the area are freelancers, working part time for more than one organization. This is the pool from which we will likely find our archivist. While the committee feels that we can do without an archivist in the immediate future, we should start looking for one with the aim of hiring the archivist in the not-too-distant future, and certainly in fiscal year 2012.

Even though she is not yet "officially" part of the archives team, Elizabeth has proven to be of extraordinary help to the committee in preparing the archives for the tasks ahead.

Oral Histories

The existing oral history tapes have largely been processed, thanks primarily to the work of Marian Green and Nancy Schwartz. Jean Horan has made very good progress in transcribing existing tapes under a contractual agreement with the committee. Volunteers have been lined up to retype transcripts that needed editing and fact-checking, and that work should be finished soon.

At the same time, the project of arranging new interviews has begun, and will be handled primarily by volunteers from town. It is essential that these interviews be conducted quickly, in view of the aging of the town's many seniors.

On June 14, Marian and Nancy Schwartz will hold a meeting among potential volunteers to resume the oral history interviews and process existing tapes as needed. We have a single-spaced list of potential interviewees that runs nearly four pages. Over time, hopefully everybody in town who has anything valuable and elucidating to say will be interviewed.

When the archives' computer system is in place, we can begin preserving both the oral history tapes and other tapes collected over the years by transferring them to CD's and to the computer. In our inspection of the archives facilities, we have also come across a number of videos and other audio recordings, but we have not had a chance to address them.

Archives physical environment

The space in the basement of Penn Place that houses the archives is not a good environment for the collection. With the unlikelihood that we can get a larger, better suited space any time soon, it is important that we make the archival environment as good as possible, given our restraints. We have air handling systems in place, but they are inadequate. We will have to find a way to scrupulously monitor and control the temperature and humidity. We have been told of systems that do this, but we will have to learn more. It has been suggested that we hire an

environmental consultant, or at least find a good environmental firm to tell us what is needed. We plan to do that in fiscal 2012.

And, while Elizabeth has managed to free up space to house material that remains to be sorted, filed and recorded, we will likely run out of space in the not-too-distant future.

Grants

During our outreach to archival organizations and professionals in the area, we were given leads to a number of local, national and even federal sources of possible grants. Most of those are for small amounts and often are given to accomplish specific tasks or to hire people with specific specialties for a short time. But longer-term and broader grants are also available. The committee has not yet had a chance to consider a grant program or approach any potential benefactors, but we retain the information and plan to do so as soon as we can get our collective heads above water.

Unfortunately, we were told, many of the grants have dried up temporarily in view of the region's and nation's current financial crises, but this should pass in the not-to-distant future.

Role of the committee

The Archives Advisory Committee was created to be just that: an advisory body. Over the past half year, we have by necessity turned into an operational committee. While we assumed that role readily in view of our enthusiasm for our responsibility, it is coming to the time when we should be able to sit back and assume a truly advisory role. The committee has spent many, many hours on archives work and cannot be thanked enough. We have found unanimity in virtually all of our thoughts and decisions, and are, I think, justly proud of what we have accomplished in our short existence.

Regional conference

Marian Green has suggested that the Garrett Park Archives host a regional conference of archivists this autumn to exchange ideas on archival management, and the committee has enthusiastically endorsed the idea. We will have further details, and expect to ask the Town Council's opinions and approval later on.

What we're asking the Council to approve now:

When you approved the fiscal 2012 Town budget in March and April, you gave the committee the authorization to spend the \$5,000 we had left in the fiscal 2011 budget as we deemed best for the archives. We are now asking your blessing for our decisions on how to proceed with our vision for the archives and the steps that we are convinced, after long hours of deliberation, research and conversations with experts, are necessary, reasonable and effective.

Some of those plans will entail expenditures

1. Purchase of the the PastPerfect software.
2. Purchase of the computer and accessories described in Appendix 4.
3. Seek the retention of a part-time shared archival contractor.
4. Initiation of an environmental improvement program including a consultant if needed.

5. The heavy reliance on volunteers to carry out many of the needed tasks.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1.

Names of archivists and other professionals met by the committee:

Kathryn Baringer. Deputy Director of Appraisals and Description, Maryland State Archives.

Sarah L. Patterson. Appraisal and Description Archivist, Maryland State Archives.

Mary A. VanBalgoo. Executive Director, Peerless Rockville.

David B. Neumann. Acting Town Archivist, Town of Washington Grove.

Kathryn L. Lehman. Town Clerk. Town of Washington Grove.

Stephanie Brown. Director. Archives and Research Center. Chevy Chase Historical Society.
(Also, archivist at Hillwood Estate, the Marjorie Merriweather Post mansion in the District)

Beth Hickey. Executive Director. Montgomery County Historical Society.

Joanna Church. Director of Collections, Montgomery County Historical Society.

Sharon Ann Holt Executive Director, Sandy Spring Museum.

David Burgevin. Archivist, Sandy Spring Museum. (Also an archivist at two other regional archives).

Julie O'Malley. Executive Director, Kensington Historical Society. (Will meet with her June 14).

In addition, we consulted with and received recommendations from:

Jenny Forehand. Maryland State Senator. District 17

Heather Bouslog. Archaeologist, Park Planning and Stewardship Division, Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission.

Appendix 2.

Archivist Job Description:

He or she:

1. Is a paid contractor of the Town of Garrett Park. Salary, hours and schedule to be negotiated.

2. Is familiar, or becomes familiar, with the Town's history, organizations, folklore, character and characters.

3. Is responsible for the Town archives: accepting, organizing and preserving archival materials of various kinds.
4. Organizes, applies and maintains effective means of access to the archives materials via manual, digital and other means such as manual card files, databases, computer programs and photography.
5. Selects, trains and supervises unpaid volunteers and paid transcribers under the guidance of the Archives Advisory Committee.
6. Prepares for Committee and Council approval written procedures and forms for effective operation of the Archives.
7. Consults with the Montgomery County and Maryland State Archives as appropriate.
8. Conducts or supervises programs, exhibits and other events about the Archives.
9. Facilitates the collection and preservation of oral histories.
10. Assists town residents and others in the secure use of the archives. Writes procedures for collection of materials and enforces them.
11. Advises the chair of the Archives Advisory Committee of needs for supplies, expansion or improvement of environmental conditions adverse to the collection or its use.
12. Solicits gifts of materials about Garrett Park. Assesses items in consultation with the Archives Advisory Committee and the Council liaison. Maintains records of donations.

Appendix 3.

Archives Mission Statement

Garrett Park is a unique historic community that dates its creation to 1886 and its incorporation as a town to 1898. The town is on the national Register of Historic Places, and part of the town is a Montgomery County historic district.

The Garrett Park Archives is a growing collection of documents about the Town and its occupants' lives since the Garrett Park community and town were created. It includes both unique items such as Town Council minutes and early and recent photographs and published cookbooks sponsored by various organizations and clippings from newspapers and magazines. Its purpose is to promote effective access and awareness of the rich history of the town and the Garrett Park community for those who want to learn more about the Town, be they the Mayor, Council

members, residents ,students or other researchers.

Its responsibility is also to preserve the town's rich heritage and the documents and materials that provide a record of the town's history and culture.

Appendix 4.

Computer and accessories.

Most of these have been priced at Micro Center in the Federal Plaza on Rockville Pike, although we might be able to buy some equipment cheaper at Best Buy or another store. The tape converter is at Radio Shack.

B818 Desktop computer.	\$730
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(According to David Altar, this computer is very high end, HDMI out which will utilize an HD monitor, or dvi which is standard, 1TB internal Hard drive, 4 gigabytes of ram, quad core processor, 8 usb ports and comes with keyboard and mouse.)

VE228H 21.5" LED backlit Widescreen LCD monitor	\$159
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(This is a very nice 21 inch asus monitor with dvi and hdmi capability).

0S02662 Life Studio Desk 1TB 3.5" USB 2.0 External Desk Hard Drive	\$79
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Logitech Wireless Keyboard K340 (better than standard keyboard)	\$49
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Microsoft Office 2010	\$210
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Adobe Acrobat Pro	\$405
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PastPerfect archives management software	c.\$700
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TapeExpress	<u>\$50</u>
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(Used to convert oral history tapes to computer files or CDs)

Total:	c.\$2382
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In addition, we will need a scanner, which will likely cost between \$200 and \$300.